

At a Glance

“The Business of Teaching Children” Engagement of Public Schools and Higher Education *September 2011*

The Education Oversight Committee (EOC) held its annual one-day retreat in Columbia on August 8. The focus of the retreat was innovative leadership.

Dr. Rainey Knight, Superintendent of the Darlington County School District, the 12th highest performing district in the state in 2010, and Dr. Russell Booker, Superintendent of Spartanburg 7, a district that is transforming its schools to increase graduation rates and student performance, attended. These two leaders provided examples of challenges, barriers and solutions to improving student achievement. The overriding theme of the discussion was captured by Dr. Knight's personal belief: “There are no excuses; we are in the business of teaching children.” Dr. Booker explained the transformational changes occurring in his district including greater parental choice in programs such as Montessori, International Baccalaureate (IB), arts-infused, and STEM schools as well as the closing of two schools and the opening of an early learning center for children ages birth to age 5.

The EOC also engaged the perspective of higher education. Dr. Lemuel Watson, the new dean of the College of Education at the University of South Carolina, spoke about his experiences with a P-20 initiative in Illinois. Dr. Watson is a native South Carolinian who has come home with a passion to see dramatic educational progress. He noted that teaching, research and public service are the role of higher education. He emphasized the importance of our state having an innovative, creative, data system.

Dr. Watson noted that education is an applied field; field experience for principals is important.

In attendance from Clemson University were Dr. Mike Padilla, Director of the Eugene T. Moore School of Education and Associate Dean of Educational Collaborations, and Dr. Hans Klar, assistant professor in Education Leadership. The Clemson leaders concurred that universities also have a responsibility to promote education change and provide research, evaluation and expertise as needed including the provision of staff and curriculum development to schools.

Dr. Klar then presented the preliminary findings of a study, *SC Successful School Principals' Project*. This project is one of other endeavors in the United States as well as in sixteen other countries. Using data files from the release of the 2009 annual school report cards, researchers at Clemson used a multiple linear regression to identify schools doing significantly better when compared to their counterparts. The schools all had a poverty index of 70% or greater. Upon identifying the schools, the researchers followed up with school visits, interviews and surveys of principals, parents, teachers, assistant principals, community liaisons and even high school students. Based on the core leadership practices, the researchers found in these schools:

- An unrelenting belief that their students could learn;
- A system of goals and rewards;
- Strong yet positive accountability of teachers and students;
- Orderly clean schools with happy students;
- Individualized professional development opportunities for teachers;
- A “no excuses” style of leadership;
- A focus on issues that helped leverage change such as implementation of a single gender program;
- A culture of collaboration;
- Community involvement;

- Focus on finding the right teachers for the classroom; and
- Instructional resources aligned with standards.

Mark Bounds, Deputy Superintendent of the Division of School Effectiveness at the South Carolina State Department of Education, described the eight programs and initiatives underway to provide support, mentoring and professional development to principals in South Carolina. He focused on the new leadership initiatives underway at the agency: alternative principal certification; tiered principal certification; and the Program for Assisting, Developing and Evaluating Principal Performance (PADEPP). Mr. Bounds noted that the Department is still concerned with the distribution of educators in rural school districts and the need to relieve principals of non-instructional duties. Next year the agency hopes to develop a program to train individuals in school administrative functions who can then be hired by principals to be responsible for many of the non-instructional responsibilities of a principal. The agency is also looking at initiatives to assist leaders in non-traditional settings including charter schools and Montessori schools.

Upcoming

Each fall the Education Oversight Committee turns its attention to three specific statutory responsibilities:

- (1) the release of the annual district and school report cards (Section 59-18-110);
- (2) the review and evaluation of the Education Accountability Act and Education Improvement Act programs and funding along with programmatic and funding recommendations to the General Assembly; (Section 59-6-10); and

(3) the ongoing public information campaign to “apprise the public of the status of public schools and the importance of high standards for academic performance, for the public school students of South Carolina” (Section 59-18-1700).

On September 19, 2011 the EIA and Improvement Mechanisms Subcommittee met to begin the review of current EIA-funded programs including the Writing Improvement Network, the South Carolina Geographic Alliance and technical assistance. All programs that receive EIA funds are required to submit annual accountability reports to the EOC. The Subcommittee will continue to meet this fall and make funding recommendations to the full EOC on December 12, 2011. The final recommendations then go to the Governor and General Assembly.

October 10, 2011 is the next meeting of the full EOC. At this meeting Josh Bell, Executive Director for Teach For America South Carolina and Cynthia Wilson, Superintendent of Orangeburg 5, will discuss the first year implementation of the Teach for America program in South Carolina. This school year approximately 31 Teach for America members are employed as teachers in South Carolina public schools with the largest number employed by Orangeburg 5. Also invited to the meeting is Dr. Gerrita Postlewait, Chair of the State Board of Education. Dr. Postlewait will discuss the new State Board Policy, *Encouraging Innovative Practice in SC Public Schools*. The EOC will also discuss its objectives for 2011-12 as well as a report analyzing what the impact of the EOC funding model weights would have had on school districts and state funding in the current fiscal year if the weights had been adopted.* ***All meetings are open to the public.***

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

*The EOC funding model and weights can be downloaded on the EOC website at <http://eoc.sc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/005CF7BA-A43F-421B-AB04-72B8B8B6E4A3/41621/AnnualUpdateofEOCFundingModel2010.pdf>